



March 19th, 2015

The Honorable Andrew Fleischmann and Gayle Slossberg
Co-Chairs, Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Opposition to SB 1096: An act concerning charter schools

Dear Chairs Fleischmann and Slossberg;

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is expressing our opposition to SB 1096.

NACSA is devoted to improving public education by improving the policies and practices of the organizations responsible for authorizing and overseeing charter schools. We advocate for authorizers to hold themselves, and the schools they oversee, to high standards based on national best practices for charter school authorizing, defined in our *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*. NACSA believes that genuine reform through charter schools occurs when authorizers adhere to three principles: maintaining high standards for schools, upholding school autonomy, and protecting student and public interests.

NACSA opposes SB 1096 because of the moratorium it would establish on the approval of new charter schools. A moratorium is not necessary. We understand that the State and the Authorizer have recently dealt with a charter school operator that breached its contract and failed to uphold the high standards we expect from our charter schools and our publically funded institutions. This was a clear failure of the charter school promise and the school is now on indefinite probation and subject to strict oversight. In the wake of an incident like this it is advisable that Connecticut examine its policies and practices and find areas for improvement. But a moratorium is not necessary to make these improvements. Authorizers and policy makers across the country have been systematically improving their charter school policies for the last dozen years while simultaneously allowing new schools to open and existing schools to expand. This has been done in places as diverse as Delaware, Illinois, Minnesota, South Carolina, and Texas—this can be done in Connecticut too.

Connecticut law is actually unique in that it lacks many of the modern charter school and authorizer accountability policies that are now recommended, as recently detailed in NACSA's report *On the Road to Better Accountability: An Analysis of State Charter School Policies*. Three of these recommended charter school accountability policies are included in SB 943, another bill heard by this committee on February 25th. This includes: a strong renewal standard that holds schools to high standards at renewal; a required performance contract that defines the roles and responsibilities of the charter

school and the authorizer; and a performance framework that sets clear performance expectations in academic, financial, and organizational performance. To provide context, currently 21 states have a strong renewal standard; 37 states require a performance contract; and 12 states require authorizers to use a performance framework. In addition, SB 943 lays out several organizational parameters concerning conflicts of interest, charter school governance, and transparency that NACSA also supports. These are all important policy areas that should be addressed. As a charter school reform package, SB 943 demonstrates how changes to state charter school policy and authorizing practices can be made while maintaining a vibrant charter sector.

We encourage the Committee to pursue this approach instead. To consider implementing proven state policies that can bring increased accountability and transparency to Connecticut's charter school sector without bringing it to an abrupt halt. In a single session this legislature can choose to enact a full modernization of Connecticut's charter school authorizing law, and, in doing so, lay the framework for a best-practices based authorizing office for years to come. A strong, autonomous, and accountable public charter school sector is within your reach.

Sincerely,

Amanda Fenton
Director of State and Federal Policy
National Association of Charter School Authorizers